



IOM International Organization for Migration  
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations  
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

## **STATEMENT**

**BY**  
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*Check against Delivery*



Madam Chair,

Your excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to congratulate you, Madam Chair, and the other member of the Bureau on your election. It is an honour for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to address this 47<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission for Social Development.

The priority theme for the 2009-2010 review and policy cycle of the Commission could not have been more aptly selected. The current global financial crisis is leading to a downturn in the global economy and its impact on "social integration" has the potential to be deep, severe and multifaceted. While the depth and extent of the crisis is difficult to predict and its impact is likely to vary according to country, geographic region and employment sector, the social protection of vulnerable groups, including migrants, risks becoming increasingly strained. The Report of the Secretary General on Promoting Social Integration (E/CN.5/2009/2) offers a very useful analysis for this debate, devoting particular attention to international migrants, acknowledging that one of the most challenging integration issues relates to the socio-economic and cultural integration of immigrants, and recognizing the global challenge that this represents in developing and developed countries alike. The unfolding financial crisis makes this analysis and these considerations all the more compelling.

Madam Chairperson,

The longer and more protracted the current recession, the greater the danger that adverse impacts will have profound effects for immigrants' integration into society, their welfare, and that of their families. Practitioners and researchers seem to agree that since immigrants are overrepresented in low skilled occupations that are typically hit hardest during downturns, and since some immigrants (such as the undocumented population) are ineligible for welfare benefits, they may suffer particular hardship during the recession<sup>1</sup>. This could damage their potential to integrate socially and economically.

It is difficult to anticipate the modalities in which the financial crisis will impact on the social integration of international migrants and while there is no concrete evidence available yet on the impact of the global financial crisis on migration, the following largely negative trends have already been observed or are likely to occur:

- Poverty and unemployment are among the most important factors causing exclusion, and yet job losses and wage depressions are largely anticipated as migrant workers are often the first to lose their jobs, especially in construction, manufacturing, services, retail and tourism, coupled with possible reductions in wages and poorer conditions in the workplace, cuts in social services provision, impacting on migrants' quality of life and health and increasing residency insecurity.
- The risk of discrimination and xenophobia as migrants are mistakenly perceived as taking the jobs of local workers particularly in low-skilled sectors of the labour

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<sup>1</sup> *Migration and the Economic Downturn: What to expect in the European Union*. Migration Policy Institute, January 2009

market. In this context, immigrants may become likely scapegoats for the increase of unemployment of native population;

- A decline in remittance flows to developing countries as migrants lose their jobs, thus increasing poverty and exacerbating inequalities and development gaps.
- Adoption of more restrictive immigration policies to protect the local labour market which could trigger an increase in irregular migration and the strengthening of the informal, unregulated labour market.
- The crisis is expected to impact differently on male and female migrant workers especially in affected sectors of the economy dominated by one gender (e.g. construction in which male migrant workers predominate).

If the above are possible scenarios, it is evident that pure market mechanisms alone will not produce social and economic inclusion, and that public social integration policies must be sustained particularly at this juncture. IOM remains of the view that human mobility, as underscored in IOM's 2008 World Migration Report,<sup>2</sup> makes economies more dynamic and more efficient. Migration may be a positive force in alleviating various aspects of the financial crisis and potentially make an important contribution towards overcoming the economic downturn. Therefore, flexible, coherent and comprehensive migration management policies are needed to maximize the benefits of migration, promote economic recovery, protect migrants and take their needs into account in measures addressing the crisis. Integration policies in particular should always accompany the management of migratory flows, keeping in mind that integration is a key to effective migration governance and the management of diversity. Such policies are all the more pertinent in an economic downturn.

Paramount in this context is the careful monitoring of the impact of the financial crisis on migrants, to ensure that the rights of migrants are effectively upheld, that migrants are not stigmatized for job losses that occur and are protected from discrimination and xenophobia in the employment and social spheres. This also calls for measures to inform the general public and raise awareness in destination countries about the valuable economic and social contributions made by migrants.

Madam Chair,

A strong degree of solidarity between countries of origin and destination is called for to safeguard and continue to harness the benefits flowing from the migration and development relationship to both sets of countries as well as to migrants and their families. By facilitating technical cooperation and exchange of good practices on integration, IOM participates in the wider effort to ensure that the economic crisis does not translate into even harsher living and working conditions for migrants, and helps reducing tensions and facilitating tolerance and dialogue among cultures, communities and individuals.

Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> *World Migration 2008: Managing Labour Mobility in the Evolving Global Economy* (IOM, Geneva, 2008) <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/cache/offonce/pid/1674?entryId=20275>.